

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AS A BASIC UNIT IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT:

The family is a basic unit on which the societies establish, build, sustain, and flourish. The family is the basic social unit through which the newborn child is first introduced to the world when it comes outside its mother's womb. As a result of this protected surrounding conditions, the child learns the basics of his or her language, values, behaviors, habits, mental and social responses, and develops a personality profile. The primary role of the family system goes far beyond reproducing and continuing the human race. This system is a source of peace and serenity in our lives and provides us psychological and physical security and wellbeing. In short, the basic family unit is a surrounding conditions of cooperation, affection, care, and love between a man and a woman and the domain of the child's earliest upbringing. The family, according to the Islamic is a highly desired constituent of human life. Islam strongly opposes isolation and not marrying. While proposing the best approach towards establishing and nurturing the families, Islam also highlights the rights and responsibilities of various family members. This article will focus on above mentioned aspects in the light of the Quran and prophetic traditions.

Keywords: *Family, Muslim society, Divisions, Father, wife, children, kin.*

INTRODUCTION:

In the muslim society, family is a structure which is formed on the basis of mutual respect, peace, love and affection. The Quran says:

"وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْتَكَرُونَ"¹

"By another sign He gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and planted love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for thinking men".

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"مَنْ تَزَوَّجَ فَقَدْ اسْتَكْمَلَ نِصْفَ الْإِيمَانِ، فَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ فِي النِّصْفِ الْبَاقِي"²

"Who marries preserves one half of his religion, so he must fear Allah about other half"

Marrying means establishing a family. It is the sunnah of our beloved messenger to marry and establish families. This sunnah is based upon the human fitrah and in accordance with basic human psychological and physiological needs. People in some culture believe that not marrying is a sign of

devotion to the Divine. However, Islam tells us that it is not the case and the Creator has commanded us to marry and establish families so that the human race can continue to exist. With this, a person not only preserves his own religion by avoiding any unlawful attraction towards the opposite sex, but also contributes to the overall wellbeing of the society where chastity is valued.

Linguistic aspects associated with the word 'family':

If we try to find the word 'family' in different dictionaries, we identify that it is described as "being an unbeatable coat of protective metal or other covering". It also means "ones' own group, people and closest family", because one finds guarded and strengthened while being with them. Defined simply, a family is a grouping of people living together and bound by family relationships or a close association.

For this discussion, the family can be divided into three main divisions:

First (and the most important one), family as a primary unit of the society which consists of whoever is living from among husband, wife and children

Second, a broader unit at a national level which bonds the people together - 'the national family'.

Third, a by far the longest and the biggest form of a family and the one which includes all the humans on this planet is our family as the humanity – all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve (may Allah's blessings be upon them both).

In the light of these definitions, the role of the family can be seen as having an important assembly whose spectrum can vary significantly depending on the perspective it is being viewed from. In our article though, our focus would be the first type of family, as defined above.

Allah says in Quran:

"يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً"³

"O mankind, revere your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single Person, created of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women".

Allah has shown His will that family should be established through a lawful relationship between a man and a woman. Such a relationship should begin with their joint permission, willingness to be together, and consent (man and woman). Islam has given higher responsibilities to males and made them responsible for providing for food, shelter, clothing, and protection for their spouses. This frees women from being responsible to run their families. However, if they wish to voluntarily contribute in a lawful manner, they can.

CHARACTERISTICS AND ROLES OF FAMILY:

Families, under the Islamic system, has following main characteristics and roles:

1. Continuation of human race:

Due to the family bonds, human reproduce; this reproduction will continue till the time our Creator wills this to continue.

Allah SWT says in Quran says:

”وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً“⁴

“Allah has given you wives from among yourselves, and through them He has granted you sons and grandsons”.

2. Safeguarding of ancestry and lineage:

System of families is also a means of understanding the lineages and ancestral relationships. In many a cases, this attachment with the ancestors is a source of pride (if controlled, with the right intentions, and for things that are good) and motivation. The psychological aspects associated with this sort of relationship can lead to positivity. However, we also consider it important to emphasis that such a pride would become evil if we feel pride in associated ourselves with those who were not on right path and were misguided (e.g. the people of Jahiliyyah – past and the present). Moreover, we should also not be obsessed with continuing the family and getting upset if we are not able to have children. In such situations, it is commonly the women who bear the brunt. This sort of injustice is clearly against the very nature of Islam and strongly prohibited.

3. Protection of chastity in society:

As a result of a lawful relation between a man and women, known as marriage, the relationship and the social structure that forms as a result, is safe and morally good. In the absence of this, the society would suffer sick and worse consequences.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said:

”يَا مَعْشَرَ الشَّبَابِ، مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ الْبَاءَةَ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ، فَإِنْهُ أَغْضُ لِلْبَصَرِ وَأَخْصَنُ لِلْفَرْجِ، وَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَعَلَيْهِ بِالصَّوْمِ فَإِنَّهُ لَهُ وِجَاءٌ“⁵

“O young people, those of you who can marry let them do so for this causes abstinence and continence but those who cannot should go on fasting, which makes them refrain and it safeguards them”.

To avoid such consequences, Islam emphasises the legal contract between the man and woman to ensure honest and just dealing between the spouses.

4. Protection against diseases:

This and the preceding century has seen an outburst of sexually transmitted diseases. This, in almost all cases, is a result of unlawful sexual relationships. However, if we confined ourselves to our lawful partners, we can get protected from such diseases. The percentage of sexually transmitted diseases in Muslim societies, owing to the family system that Islam prescribes for its followers, are very low as compared to other cultures and societies where the family system is unbalanced as a result of illegal and uncontrolled sexual relationships. Many sexually transmitted diseases, like AIDS, highlight the importance and need of legal relationships.

5. Psychological and Spiritual comfort:

Family is the root out of which kindness, love and compassion between the wife, husband, and their children spring out. Love is the primary source of sustenance which enables us to survive in the toughest of times and the most difficult of situations. For the spirituality, peace of mind, calmness and psychological wellbeing to flourish, family system provides an essential atmosphere, provided it is established in accordance with the universal laws of love and affection that Islam promotes.

6. Family as a supportive institution:

Husband or wife or both work together in their own spheres of responsibility, with each of them having their own distinct abilities and strengths. Family members are there to support each other. Husbands are there to console their wives when they are sad and assist them in their daily errands. Wives, being emotionally more aware, help their husbands recompose when they lose focus and keep them positive. Children are being tirelessly taken care of by parents when they are young. They reciprocate the kindness back when their parents get old and the cycle continues.

Islam superbly desires the building of families and marriages. Allah narrated in Quran:

"وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِنَّ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِيهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ"⁶

"And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and female slaves. If they should be poor, Allah will enrich them from His bounty and Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing".

RIGHTS OF FAMILY MEMBERS:

In the following sections, we will briefly summarize the rights and responsibilities of various family members.

The rights of husbands:

Allah SWT says in the Quran:

"الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاصْرَبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا"⁷

"Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and chastise them. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted, Great."

As to the prophetic traditions we cite the following:

Umm-e-Salama (رضي الله عنها) narrates that Muhammad ﷺ said:

"أَيُّمَا امْرَأَةٍ مَاتَتْ، وَرَوَّجُهَا عَنْهَا رَاضٍ، دَخَلَتْ الْجَنَّةَ"⁸

"Any woman with whom her husband is pleased shall go to paradise when she dies."

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also says:

"إِذَا دَعَا الرَّجُلُ امْرَأَتَهُ إِلَى فِرَاشِهِ، فَأَبَتْ أَنْ تَجِيءَ، لَعَنَتْهَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ حَتَّى تُصْبِحَ" ⁹

"The angels will execrate or damn the woman who forsakes her husband's bed all night long till she wakes up."

2. The rights of wives:

Allah SWT says in Quran:

"وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ" ¹⁰

"Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them".

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says:

"عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ حَيْدَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ ، قَالَ : قُلْتُ : يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ، مَا حَقُّ زَوْجَةٍ أَحَدِنَا عَلَيْهِ ؟ قَالَ : " أَنْ تُطْعِمَهَا إِذَا طَعِمْتَ ، وَتَكْسُوَهَا إِذَا اكْتَسَيْتَ ، وَلَا تَضْرِبَ الْوَجْهَ ، وَلَا تُقْبِحَ وَلَا تَهْجُرَ إِلَّا فِي الْبَيْتِ ". ¹¹

"When Muawiyah Ibn Haidah asked Prophet Muhammad ﷺ what rights one's woman must enjoy, Prophet replied: To give her to eat when you eat, to buy her clothing when you get new clothes, not to hit her face, nor to call her bad names, nor to forsake her save when at home".

3. The rights of children:

Allah says in Quran:

"Allah has ordered you regarding your children" ¹²

Allah SWT also says in Quran that:

"وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا" ¹³

"You shall not kill your children for fear of want. We will provide for them and for you. To kill them is a great sin".

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says:

"مَنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْ صَغِيرَنَا، وَيَعْرِفْ حَقَّ كَبِيرِنَا فَلَيْسَ مِنَّا" ¹⁴

"Whoever is not kind to our children or does not give honor to our elders does not belong to our community".

"مَنْ عَالَ ثَلَاثَ بَنَاتٍ، فَأَدَّبَهُنَّ، وَرَزَقَهُنَّ، وَأَحْسَنَ إِلَيْهِنَّ، فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ" ¹⁵

"Whosoever supplies three girls (daughters) or three sisters with sustenance it becomes incumbent upon Allah to enter him in His paradise".

4. Rights of parents:

Allah SWT says in the Quran:

"وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَيَالِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغَنَّ عَنْكَ الْكِبَرُ أَخَذَهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا" ¹⁶

"Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him, and to show kindness to your parents. If either or both of them attain old age in your presence, show them no sign of impatience, nor rebuke them; but speak to them kind words. Treat them with humility and tenderness and say: My Lord, be merciful to them. They nursed me when I was an infant".

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says:

"رِضَا اللَّهِ فِي رِضَا الْوَالِدَيْنِ، وَسَخَطُ اللَّهِ فِي سَخَطِ الْوَالِدَيْنِ" ¹⁷

"The Lord's pleasure results from parents' pleasure, and His wrath is the outcome of theirs"

5. Rights of kinsfolks:

Kinfolks are our relations, like sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and cousins (both maternal and paternal). Islam enjoins rights of relatives upon us. Sometimes, in certain family situations, we come across bitter experiences. In such situations as well, Islam emphasizes us to have softness and an open-mind towards others as it preserves the unification of family. If families are unified, it would result in the whole nation being unified. The Quran and Sunnah of the messenger ﷺ emphasis such an attitude in the following terms.

Allah SWT says in the Quran:

"Those who are bound by ties of blood are nearest to one another" ¹⁸

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ قَاطِعٌ رَحِمٍ" ¹⁹

"The person who severs the bond of kinship will not enter paradise."

CONCLUSION:

Under the family system that Islam proposes, the mother is considered the prime teacher and carer for her children as she is best positioned to take on this responsibility considering the love and rahmah that Allah has filled her heart with for her children. Islam guides us to respect all members of the family and requires that every Muslim should show mercy to other family members i.e parents, sisters, brothers, uncles and aunts (both paternal and maternal). In Islam, worship is not

restricted only the prayer, fasting, hajj and other personal actions, rather Islam fosters healthy family and communal relationships and puts them under the banner of ibadah and worship. A man caring for his wife and kids is a form of ibadah. A wife taking care of her kids and husband is an act of worship for which she will be rewarded, if done with good intentions. Islam has enjoined rights of our family members on us, be them near or far. In many situations we see that there are many relatives who are separated by geographic boundaries and distances. We should leave them alone in the time of need and should proactively come forward to assist with whatever we can. Let us take this opportunity to firm up our ties of kinships and relations and get closer to our Creator by spreading love and mercy.

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¹³ Al Quran 17:31

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